

I'LL KNOW IT WHEN I SEE IT

What did Henry Ford and Steve Jobs have in common? Both of them believed in innovation—that customers often did not know what they wanted until someone showed it to them. Steve Jobs said, “It's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them.” Henry Ford said, “If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse.”

Buyers do not always know what they need. Sometimes, they need to be told what they need. Why? Maybe, they have given up on a problem. Maybe, they could not imagine that anyone else had that type of problem. Maybe, they never just think about what they are really dealing with. Maybe, they think their problem has no solution.

There is a difference between being a customer advocate and a customer minion. A customer advocate will tell the customer what they need to hear; a minion will tell the customer what he or she wants to hear. Imagine going to the doctor and telling the doctor what to prescribe. A good physician diagnoses your problem and prescribes to the disease, not just to your desires. A good physician will listen to the patient as part of the diagnostic process and then continue to verify the cause of the illness.

Customers may think they know what they need, and maybe they are right. Maybe, they are wrong. If they are wrong and if you are a customer advocate, you will advise them differently for all the right reasons. This is a mark of your professionalism. You will invest yourself—immerse yourself—in the customer's world; study their needs and the driving forces behind these needs; diagnose, based on your study; review how others have dealt with this problem; and tap into all of your resources to offer the right solution. You cannot make the patient take the medicine; you can only prescribe and urge the patient to take it. You are not responsible for the patient; you are responsible to the patient.

A customer advocate studies the problem and unleashes his or her resourcefulness in an attempt to solve the problem. Innovation, bounded only by your creativity and initiative, is the opposite of commoditization. It is beyond differentiation. It is value creation.

Author byline: Tom Reilly is a professional speaker and author of twelve books. Tom is literally the guy who wrote the book on *Value-Added Selling* (McGraw-Hill, 2010), the book that started the value selling revolution. For more information on Tom's presentations, training, and products, visit his website www.TomReillyTraining.com or call his office, 636-537-3360.